

## MINUTES OF SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD MEETING - TUESDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2023

### Present:

Councillor Galley (in the Chair)

Councillors

Cartmell  
Critchley

Ellison  
Flanagan

B Mitchell  
C Mitchell

Mrs Scott

### In Attendance:

Councillor Lynn Williams, Leader of the Council

Ms Kate Aldridge, Head of Corporate Delivery Performance and Commissioning

Mrs Sharon Davis, Scrutiny Manager

Ms Anna Fothergill, Customer Relations Manager

Mr Mark Golden, Head of Accountancy and Deputy S151 Officer

Mr Jonathan Pickup, Head of Information Governance

Mr Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Partnerships

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communication

### 1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

### 2 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 11 JULY 2023

The Board agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held on 11 July 2023 be signed by the Chair as a true and correct record.

### 3 CHANNEL SHIFT SCRUTINY REVIEW - UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism and Communication and Ms Kate Aldridge, Head of Corporate Delivery Performance and Commissioning provided an update on the progress made in implementing the recommendations from the Channel Shift Scrutiny Review Panel.

Recommendation 1	It was noted that work continued on creating a single sign on for Council services and that an ICT related solution would be required. With regards to the development of a brand/slogan for Channel Shift at Blackpool further work was needed and it was agreed that the Chair would meet with Mr Welsh outside of the meeting to discuss this further.
Recommendation 2	Ms Aldridge advised that work with the third and community sector was cohesive and services were working well together. The FYI Directory was regularly updated with a good system developed within the resources available. The Board noted the good progress made in implementing the recommendation.
Recommendation	The importance of educating people to stay safe when using

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3	social media was noted. The support had continued in order to improve levels of digital literacy. It was considered that the next steps would involve consideration of data access.
Recommendation 4	Mr Welsh advised that the Council website had been completely refreshed, links to the wholly-owned companies had been included with the parks information fully developed by the service. The importance of ensuring the information was regularly updated and refreshed was noted.  The Board noted the work undertaken to date and requested that the information regarding the wholly-owned companies, the work they do for the benefit of the town be expanded.
Recommendation 5	The update was noted and it was agreed to meet with Blackpool Coastal Housing outside of the Board meeting.
Recommendation 6	It was noted that a regular staff newsletter incorporating a blog by the Chief Executive was now being distributed. Members considered it important that staff also benefited from Channel Shift.
Recommendation 7	Ms Aldridge reported that Covid had impacted the implementation of the recommendation. It was noted that the number of systems used by services, even with the NHS itself, made the situation complex. The focus was on ensuring that adult social care and health services had access to the information they needed to support a patient. Staff were more integrated than ever and were often co-located to promote information sharing.
Recommendation 8	It was noted that the cost of bin-tags was currently prohibitive.
Recommendation 9	Work was continuing on the Adopt and Alley scheme.
Recommendation 10	It was reported that resource had been put into developing a staff newsletter and an e-newsletter version of Your Blackpool. The newsletters were content rich and offered opportunities to engage and interactivity. There was still a market for the paper version which would continue to be circulated.

### The Board agreed:

1. To note the updates provided on the recommendations.
2. That the Chair hold individual meetings with Mr Welsh and Blackpool Coastal Housing to progress some of the recommendations further.
3. To receive a full update on the recommendations to the Board in approximately 12 months time.

## 4 ANNUAL CUSTOMER FEEDBACK REPORT

Ms Anna Fothergill, Customer Relations Manager and Mr Jonathan Pickup, Head of Information Governance presented the Annual Customer Feedback Report to the Board. It was noted that the comments, complaints and compliments information relating to

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waste services had not been included in the annual report for 2022/2023. This was due to the services now being provided by Blackpool Waste Services Limited, a wholly-owned company which had its own procedures and reporting mechanisms for feedback received. It was noted that complaints related to waste services totalled approximately 20% of all Council complaints in the previous year.

Ms Fothergill advised that the Ombudsman had indicated that the focus should not be on the number of complaints but rather the number upheld in some way and what could be learnt from those experiences. She advised that the Ombudsman was changing the way in which upheld complaints were recorded and all would be described as upheld if they were so in any small part.

Members noted the importance of having open channels of communication with residents and encouraging feedback in all forms.

The Board discussed the future reporting of feedback in detail, suggesting that the elements relating to Children and Young People, Adult Social Care and Health, Levelling Up and Climate Change and Environment be submitted to the individual scrutiny committees in future years. It was noted that the focus would not be on the specific complaints, but any themes that could be identified in order to ascertain service improvement and learning. The Committees would look at how well feedback was responded to and how confident services were regarding changes made to practice.

### **The Board agreed:**

That the Chair meet with Ms Fothergill and Mr Pickup to explore the future reporting of feedback to the Scrutiny Committees.

## **5 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MONITORING AS AT MONTH 4 2023/24 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25 - 2026/27**

Mr Mark Golden, Head of Accountancy (Deputy S151 Officer) provided an update on the financial performance monitoring as at Month 4 and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 – 2026/27. He noted the improvement in the overspend by £627k from Month 3 and that there had been early indications of a further improvement in Month 5.

There were encouraging signs in Children's Social care with a reduction in residential placements and a lower level of agency staff. It was also reported that Council Tax and NNDR collection rates were up year on year.

The Board was informed that working balances had reduced to cover the in-year pressure and that these would need to be reinstated to the target level of £6m.

It was also reported that Earmarked Revenue Reserves (ERR) had fallen in-year mainly due to the planned use of £9.9m to set the 2023/24 budget. ERR remained relatively high at £33m.

In response to a question on the impact of the projected overspend of £4m plus in Children's Services, Mr Golden explained that this would be covered by working balances. These were set aside to provide a cushion for in-year pressures and had been reinstated to £6m at the start of 2023/24. However, he advised that it was imperative to try to

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reduce the overspends across Directorates which in turn would boost working balances. The Leader of the Council added that work was ongoing to review high cost placements and to bring placement costs down. The innovative work being undertaken in this area by the Council was highlighted.

The Board queried the projected position at the end of the year. In response, Mr Golden advised that an overspend of £5.1million was forecasted with working balances at £1.7million at the end of March 2024. He advised that financial procedure rules stated that overspend should not exceed 1% of the gross revenue budget and that working balances should not be below £3million. If the projections were correct the overspend would be marginally below the 1% allowable, however, working balances would be lower than in the rules. Council services were working hard to identify potential savings and reduce costs in year in order to improve the position. He noted that should the position not improve and working balances remain less than in the rules then a revised emergency budget would need to be produced by the end of the financial year. However, he reiterated that he hoped this would not be required due to the ongoing work.

In response to further questions, Mr Golden advised that the budget process for 2024/2025 had commenced in April 2023. Meetings were being held fortnightly with the Corporate Leadership Team in order to identify savings proposals for the next year. It was noted that the Scrutiny Leadership Board was due to feed into the budget process in December 2023 and January 2024 and that a focus on the assumptions being made in the budget would be helpful with any ideas for budget savings welcomed. Mr Golden also agreed to recirculate the guidance note provided in July 2023 on good financial scrutiny.

A key issue was identified as future Council Tax collection, level of income generated, the spread of bands, locations and discounts and it was agreed that the Board set up a review panel in order to consider this issue in more detail. A scoping meeting would be held with a proposal brought back to a future meeting of the Board.

### **The Board agreed:**

To establish a review panel to consider Council Tax and bring back a scoping proposal to a future meeting.

## **6 SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP BOARD WORKPLAN**

The Board noted its workplan for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

## **7 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted the date and time of the next meeting as the informal meeting on the Wednesday 6 December 2023, commencing at 6.00pm.

**Chairman**

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(The meeting ended at 7.32 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:

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